

## HOW TO WIN OVER TEMPTATION

### Developing a Faith That Works - Part 4 of 15

#### James 1:12-18

**Student Outline: Excerpts from Rick Warren, Saddleback Christian Church**

### INTRODUCTION

1. Man's oldest problem is **temptation**. It goes all the way back to Adam. We all eventually face it. Sometimes even when you know what's right to do it's difficult to say "No". It is difficult. Oscar Wilde once said, "I can withstand anything except temptation." The only way to get rid of temptation is to give into it.

2. The Bible talks about two different kinds of testing. One is called **trials**. The other is called **temptation**. Both of them use the same word in Greek -- "**peirasmos**". Sometimes it's translated "**trials**", sometimes "**temptations**". It doesn't matter because sometimes a situation can be both a trial and a temptation. But to distinguish them -- trials are situations designed by God in order to help us grow. Temptations are designed by the devil in order to cause us to sin.

3. James 1:12 says "*Blessed is the man who endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him.*" There is a prize, a reward, for enduring temptation.

a. First it said "**blessed**" -- happy. Happiness comes from having your life under control, so that there is no bad habit that is devastating you.

b. When you know how to say "no" to temptation it produces happiness in your life. It also says there is a "crown of life". In the Greek this literally means "**life itself**".

c. James says, when you **understand temptation, when you overcome it, when you learn to say "no"** then you begin to really live. It is a crown which is life -- abundant life -- itself.

### I. HOW DO I HANDLE TEMPTATIONS?

The question is, "How? How do I handle temptation? How do I say no when I want to say yes?" James, being the practical apostle that he is, gives us five principles.

#### 1. Be Realistic

a. Face the fact: You will be tempted. Even Christians are tempted. All of us are tempted. "*When tempted ...*" not "*if tempted...*" It's just like trials, temptations are inevitable. Have you ever met a pious person who says, "I thank God I have never been tempted in 42 years!" That's what you get when you cross a crocodile and an abalone -- a crock of baloney. Everybody's tempted. You're tempted. I'm tempted. Every day we're tempted. You never get too old for it. You never overcome it by getting too spiritual. Everybody's tempted. The more you grow toward the Lord, the more you're going to be tempted. It's a fact of life. Reality is all of us are tempted.

**b. There's a misconception that says, once you're born again you've got it all together.** You've arrived so you fake it and wear a mask and pretend like, "How could anybody do something like that?" We all are tempted. I Corinthians 10:13 *"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man."* Circle "common to man" -- that means we're all in the same boat. We all have the same temptations, the same problems. Don't be surprised, shocked. Don't try to hide it. Some of you are caught in a compromising situation right now, but it is liberating to know that other people feel the same way you do. We all have the same struggles and problems.

**c. It is not a sin to be tempted. It is a sin to give in to temptation.** Hebrew 4:15 *"Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are yet he sinned not."* He was perfect. He was tempted but He never gave in. It's not a sin to be tempted. It's a sin to give into temptation. I meet a lot of Christians who are intimidated by temptation. They think "How could I have such a thought?" The devil put it in your mind; it's not your fault. You are human. Temptation proves you're human, not that you're evil. It's not a sin to be tempted, it's a sin to give in to temptation. The more committed you are the more you're going to be tempted.

## 2. Be responsible

**a. Accept responsibility.** Don't blame other people for your problems. We love to blame people, even God. V. 13 *"When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone."* God does not tempt, but we love to blame others. Will Rogers said you could summarize American history into two great movements: the passing of the buffalo and the passing of the buck. We are in a society of irresponsibility. Blame society, blame the government, blame the environment, blame heredity, blame your parents, blame your spouse, blame the devil, even blame God. Some people say, "It must be God's will or He wouldn't have let it happen." That's called blaming God. I had a guy tell me, "God told me to leave my wife and go marry someone else that I met at church." That's called blaming God. Don't make your bad choices and then blame them on God. God does not tempt. He never contradicts His word. God is not going to tell you one thing and have the Bible say something different. If the Bible says something and you say something different, you're wrong. Be responsible. Don't blame God and don't blame other people. It's a sign of immaturity.

**b.** The fact is I bring most of my problems onto myself. So do you. We bring them on ourselves. If I'm ever going to break those bad habits I want to get rid of, first I have to be realistic: I am tempted. Then number two, I've got to be responsible. I quit passing the buck and making excuses.

## 3. Be ready

**a.** When temptation comes, be ready. Be prepared for it. 1 Peter 5:8-11 says, *"Be on your guard."* Jesus said Luke 22:31-32, *"Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation."* Paul said Ephesians 6:10-18, *"Put on the whole armor of God"*. Be ready. Be prepared.

**b.** James 1:14 says *"Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desires, he is dragged away and enticed. Don't be deceived my dear brothers..."* Circle "**deceived**" -- we need to be ready and prepared for temptation. Temptation does not warn you in advance. One of the reasons

it's a temptation is because you don't even know it's there. It catches you by surprise. You've got to be ready and on your guard. We are most vulnerable after a tremendous success. We think we're doing OK. 1 Corinthians 10:12 *"Let him who thinks he standeth, take heed lest he fall."* t Bobby Leach who went over Niagara Falls in a barrel and came out unharmed. A couple of days later he slipped on an orange peel and broke his leg. It's the little things in life that kill us. James is saying, "Be ready, don't be deceived."

c. **How do you prepare for temptation?** How do you get ready for it? **By understanding how it operates.** II Corinthians 2:11 *"In order that Satan might not outwit us, we are not unaware of his schemes."* God wants you to know how the devil operates, how he tempts. The only thing you can say about the devil that's good is this: he's consistent. He's been using the same old bag of tricks for 2000 years and longer. It's very easy to discover his process. Temptation is a process, never just a one-time act.

d. **James outlines the four steps that the devil uses in order to tempt you.**

1. v. 14 *"Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desires..."* -- the first step of **temptation is desire.** It's an inside job. Most desires are OK. You couldn't live without desires: a desire to eat, drink, sleep, the sexual desire, to accomplish. God gives us these desires. Those are good desires. They are good gifts. **But any desire out of control becomes destructive. Satan loves to take routine desires and turn them into runaway desires. You are consumed, obsessed by it:** food, work, having fun, sex, money. Legitimate desires but when they are out of control they become a problem. Temptation is like steel in a magnet. There's an inward and outward part. There's an outward circumstance. But there's an inward drive, desire. If it wasn't for the inward desire you wouldn't be tempted. It starts on the inside. It's often the fulfillment of a legitimate desire in the wrong way at the wrong time. It always starts with the desire.

2. The second step is **deception.** *"He is dragged away and enticed ..."* James uses a couple of terms from the sports world. The word "dragged away" is a hunter's term which literally means "snared in a trap". "Enticed" is a fisherman's term which means "lured by bait". The secret of great fishing is in the bait. The right kind of bait for the right kind of fish. How many fish will you catch with a bare hook? You've got to put bait on it, and the right kind of bait for the right kind of fish.

a. What kind of bait does the devil use on you? He knows your hot button. He knows your weakness. He knows you inside and out. He knows what turns you on. He knows what you will fall for. He hides his hook in his bait and the bait appeals to your weakness. The crazy thing is that often we see the hook and we know it's a temptation but we keep right on nibbling. People say to me, "Rick, back off. I know what I'm doing. I'm an adult. I'm not going to get hurt. I know how far to go." And that person is deceived. They've gone to step two -- from desire to deception.

It always starts with the desire. Then Satan moves to deception. Temptation always looks better than it really is. Desire turns to deception and deception turns to disobedience.

3. **Disobedience.** *"Then after desire has conceived it gives birth to sin."* What begins in your mind results in an action. It starts in your imagination. The battle starts with your

thoughts. It moves from your thoughts into actions. First the devil gets your attention, then he gets you to have an attitude, then he gets you to commit the action. He knows if he can get your attention he will eventually get you to commit the action. People say, "What's the danger in a harmless fantasy?" What starts in your mind eventually comes out in your life. It always begins in the imagination. What you flirt with, you will fall for. That's the whole purpose behind television advertising. They try to get you to imagine something. They know if they can get it in your imagination they've got you. If that didn't work nobody would advertise. We're silly to think that's not true. You think you haven't done anything but you have. The Bible says what starts in your mind eventually comes out in your lifestyle. Desire leads to deception, deception leads to disobedience. Disobedience leads to death.

4. **Death.** *"Sin, when full grown gives birth to death."* That's the tragic consequence of giving in. That's what losing the battle causes -- devastating results. What is death? The exact opposite of living. If you overcome temptation you get the crown of life, but the wages of sin are death -- spiritual separation from God. James says we are free to choose any way we want to live. I could choose any way I want to live and so can you. God gave me the freedom of choice. I could choose to live any way I want to. But I am not free to choose the consequences of the choices. I am free to have my kicks, but I am not free to eliminate the kickbacks. I am free to make choices, but I'm not free to choose the consequences.

e. In order to overcome temptation, in order to break a bad habit, first I've got to be realistic, and admit I have a problem. Then I've got to be responsible and not blame anybody else and quit making excuses. Then I get ready by understanding what happens during temptation so I can learn how to avoid it.

f. All of a sudden in verse 17, James switches gears. He starts talking about the goodness of God. It looks like he forgot what he was talking about -- at first. v. 17 *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows."*

g. James is talking about temptation then all of a sudden he redirects our thoughts to the goodness of God. First he's talking about something negative then he's talking about something positive. He's refocusing our attention on something else. Why? Because that's the next step in overcoming temptation. Be realistic, be responsible, be ready, be refocused.

#### 4. Be refocused

a. If temptation begins with our inner thoughts then changing what we think about is the key to overcoming it. This is the principle of replacement, the key to overcoming temptation. **The key to overcoming temptation is not to fight temptation but simply refocus your thoughts. Change your attention.** Turn your attention on something else. Shift your thoughts. Change your mind. Refocus. Instead of looking at what you're being tempted by, just look somewhere else. Refocus. Philippians 4:8 says *"Think on these things, things that are good, positive, just, honest."* Focus your mind on the goodness of God. Why? Because the more you fight a feeling the more it grabs you. Don't focus on what you don't want. Focus on what you do want. Turn your attention. Be refocused. Get your eyes off the negative. Get your eyes on the goodness of God. Are you a chronic worrier? It's because you're doubting the goodness of God. Whatever gets your attention, gets you. Whatever you resist, persists. Stop fighting it, just

refocus. Turn your back on it. How do you get out of depression? Not by looking at what you are and telling yourself what you are. That never changes you. Focus on what you want, Psalms 150 says *"This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad."* It's a choice. Psalm 34 says, *"I will bless the Lord at all times ... His praise will continually be in my mouth ... I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* Get God's word in your mind and refocus. Quit fighting the feeling. What you resist, persists. You can't fight a feeling. But if you ignore it, you weaken it.

b. Don't try to argue with the devil. He's a lot better at it than you are. He's had thousands of years of experience. When temptation calls, drop the receiver, and forget it. When you refocus, it may mean physically removing yourself from the situation. **If you don't want to get stung, get away from the bees.** Maybe you need to change the channel on the TV. Maybe you need to walk out of that movie. Maybe you need to change jobs. Maybe you need to change a car pool. Joseph was in a tempting situation and he left his coat and ran. If you have to leave your coat, leave your coat. Walk out. I Corinthians 15:33 *"Bad company corrupts good character."* You know your weakness and God does to. Maybe you need to be redirected.

c. *"He chose to give us birth [circle "birth"] through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruit of all that he created."* He's not talking about physical birth. He's talking about being spiritually born. A rebirth. Starting over with God.

## 5. Be reborn

a. The single most important principle in breaking bad habits and getting control of your life is to let God have control of it. Get Him in your life so He can start changing your character. Being born again gives you a new capacity to resist temptation. You don't have enough power in your own willpower. That's why you keep falling. You need some supernatural power. You need Jesus Christ in your life. That's what it means to be reborn. It means you get a fresh start on life. Ask Christ in. Ask Him to make the changes and give you the power you need to do what you know is right to do anyway. You will not be able to say no to temptation until you first learn to say yes to God. You need His power in your life. You need to not only be redirected and these other things but you need to be reborn. That's the starting point. Then you'll have more than just your own power.

b. What is your most vulnerable area today? What is your weak spot? God knows it. The devil knows it. Have you ever figured it out? If you haven't, you need to because once you've figured out where you're weak you will know when and where you're most likely to fall and you can avoid it. It's stupid to put yourself in situations that will automatically tempt your weakest area. Where are you vulnerable? Be realistic about the problem. Where do I have a lack of self-control? Is it my temper? Is it my appetite? Is it spending? Is it my words -- I'm continually talking all the time and say things I later regret? Is it drinking? Is it cocaine? Drugs? Is it lustful thoughts? What is the area that Satan knows is my hot button and he's always baiting me in that area? Figure it out and then admit it to God. Say, "God, You know the areas I've fallen in. I've stumbled. I want a clean slate. I want to start over. Get free of the past. Get forgiveness. That's available. Then salvation is the first step in victory over temptation. Ask Christ to come into your life and give you the power.

c. I Corinthians 10:13, *"God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so you can stand up under it."* What a great promise! God never puts more on you -- He never allows more on you -- than He puts in you to bear it up! You say, "I just couldn't help myself!" Wanna bet? "It was too strong of a temptation, I just couldn't help myself!" God says that is not true. You're just depending on yourself instead of depending on Him. God says, "I will make a way out if you trust Me." The fact is there is hope and you can change if you want to and if you'll let Christ change you from the inside out. There is a way out if you trust in Him. You can't pray "Lord, lead us not into temptation" if, at the same time, you're flirting with temptation. You've got to co-operate. Some of you are flirting with temptation in many different areas. Satan is baiting you for a trap.

**d. What is it that you want in your life so badly that you're willing to compromise in order to get it?** A promotion? A thrill? Confess it to God. The time to deal with temptation is right at the start. When it starts in the desire stage, nip it in the bud.

e. Martin Luther, the great German theologian, said, "We cannot keep the birds from flying over us, but we can keep them from making a nest in our hair." You cannot live in a temptation free world. It's all around you. It's not a sin to be tempted. So don't be intimidated by it. It is a sin when you begin to dwell on that temptation and think about it so that it eventually begins to take form in your life and heart.

### **Resources you need in order to fight temptation:**

1. **Fellowship with other Christians.** You will not make it if you do not have fellowship with other Christians. We were not meant to fight the battle by ourselves. Get involved with some Christian friends. Get involved in a Bible study, a small group. Find a place where you can share, meet some friends, then begin to share on a gut level. Share the problem you're struggling with. We are all in the same boat. Temptations are common to man. When you're able to talk about a problem you are able to get control of it. Revealing your feelings is the beginning of healing. If you hold it in and you don't tell anybody, it just gets worse and becomes something that scares you to death.

2. **Get into God's word.** The Bible is our secret weapon against temptation. It is the truth. Jesus said in 8:32, *"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free."* Do you want to be free from that bad habit? Fill your mind with this book. Refocus on it. Instead of thinking about what's getting you down, get your mind on what's good, whatever is true, and just and holy. Study it, memorize it, meditate on it. Fill your life with it and get into a Bible study. If you know the truth it will keep you from being deceived. If you want to know how Satan attacks, study the Bible.

3. **What is the payoff?** **James 1:12** *"Blessed (happy) is the man who endures temptation... (it's that good feeling of self-confidence and self-esteem because you realize you're not being controlled by anything except the Lord) ... when he is tried he shall receive the crown which is life... (you begin to enjoy the abundant life) ... which the Lord has promised to them that love Him."*